

**Iowa Department of Natural Resources
Natural Resource Commission**

ITEM

12

INFORMATIONAL

TOPIC

Information Regarding Special Deer Hunts

The attached is provided as information to the NRC regarding special deer hunts.

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Conservation and Recreation Division

Attachment: Information Regarding Special Deer Hunts

September 13, 2007

Information Regarding Special Deer Hunts

Because local ordinances prohibit hunting in cities and urban settings in many cases, those areas are prone to providing Iowa's deer herd with a refuge and may cause deer populations to become vast in some Iowa cities. Without hunting to cull the deer herd in Iowa, the Iowa deer herd population may as much as double every three years.

To assist in managing overpopulation of deer in our urban areas, the Natural Resources Commission had adopted rules, pursuant to the authority provided in Iowa Code chapters 455A and 481A, to allow for the creation of special deer population management zones. These recently amended rules are found in 571 Iowa Administrative Code chapter 105. Special deer population management zones are limited to areas within the management of the Department, county conservation boards, or other local governments.

Specifically, the rules allow for urban deer management zones and prescribe a procedure by which the Commission may allow a hunt in such areas and the participating city may regulate the qualifications of the hunter, such as setting additional requirements on the hunters participating in the hunts, including additional hunter safety education course, passing a weapons proficiency course, or otherwise being approved by the city's police force and/or the Department's conservation officer. The rules require the Commission to approve the season, method of take, the number of take, and the type of license required for any such deer hunt to occur. Deer depredation biologists employed by the Department make these determinations and recommend them to the Commission for adoption. The Commission's approval of these recommendations does not bind the city to executing the special hunt.

Some cities have developed Deer Task Forces, which are not defined in code. These groups have historically been a mixture of city officials and local citizens who will work with one of the Department's wildlife biologists to discuss the deer population of the area and develop strategies to manage that population. Deer Task Forces have the authority under the code to request a special hunt.

The role of the DNR deer depredation biologists for all special hunts is to provide the technical assistance to the program and leave communities to evaluate which of the control strategies may best fit their needs. DNR depredation biologists work with city and county officials, state parks managers, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Refuge Managers and the Contractor at the Iowa Army Ammunition Plant each year to determine the locations of the hunts, season, method of take, number of take and type of licenses required.

The DNR depredation biologists request approval of these determinations for the special hunts at the Commission's regularly scheduled June meeting for a number of reasons. For one, pre-approving the control program will allow the cities and other participants of the special hunts ample time to adopt the requirements, as may be required by their administrative procedures. Secondly, this prior notice allows the depredation biologists to work with the city and local vendors to educate them about the special hunts. Finally, approval at the June NRC meeting is necessary to ensure the information about these special hunts is included in the Department's hunting season regulations booklet, an annual publication of the Department that informs law

enforcement personnel and the general public about hunting seasons in the state. The publication includes information regarding Commission-approved special hunts as well as contact information for local officials and planners related to these hunts.

Inclusion in the publication is not a requirement to hold a hunt nor does it guarantee that licenses to participate in the hunt will be issued, but it does acknowledge that the city may be eligible to have a special hunt. Department licensing staff control the availability of licenses through its automated licensing system, the Electronic Licensing System of Iowa. Therefore, licenses to participate in special hunts are not available until the Department makes them available through this licensing system.

The Commission has approved special hunts in many urban areas throughout the state. Currently, special hunts are held in Cedar Falls, Waterloo, Dubuque, Marion, Cedar Rapids, Denison, Ottumwa, Ames, Bettendorf, Clinton, Davenport, Muscatine, Coralville, Des Moines, West Des Moines, Clive, Johnston and Urbandale. Dubuque, Waterloo, Cedar Falls, and cities in Polk County have experienced dramatically positive results utilizing the special hunts.

The Department has much experience in managing special hunts, as many have been held on state and county park lands with little to no interference with park users. A special hunt in Black Hawk County has occurred every year since 1994. Population estimates based on aerial counts were 50 deer per square mile when the hunts began, and since 2000, those estimates have hovered closer to 20 to 30 deer per square mile. Kent Park in Johnson County and Scott County Park in Scott County are two county-managed parks where special hunts have lowered deer numbers considerably. In the mid 1990's, population estimates based on aerial counts in Kent Park showed that more than 300 deer in the park and surrounding area. After several years of special hunts, the counts have been approximately 100 deer.

In the nearly 13 years the Department has administered special hunts for the Commission, there have been no problems encountered related to safety. The Department contends that special hunts are a useful tool that cities may use to manage deer populations; that the most effective manner for which the Department to administer the program is to provide cities an opportunity to participate and plan well before the seasons would start; and that cities, and not the Department, should remain responsible to ensuring those cities comply with their public notice and ordinance adoption procedures and local policing efforts in overseeing the hunts.

In recent discussions regarding process improvement, the Department is in agreement that a written request on behalf of the city be received for evaluation prior to the regular June NRC meeting. We further believe the Department staff will provide the city with a degree of latitude on these requests when a city has been working toward a special hunt but may need additional time before city council has taken specific action (ie: DNR staff believes the city will want to conduct a hunt).